



Chandra takes a break in her garden, surrounded by fresh vegetables that she grew herself.

# TRUE TEEN STORY

## Vocabulary

**diabetes:** a disease in which there is too much sugar in the blood

**impact:** effect

**donations:** gifts given to help a cause

**fund:** pay for

**produce** (PRO-dooss): fresh vegetables and/or fruit



# Growing Hope

**Chandra was once homeless and sick. After a garden changed her life, she helped create 91 gardens for people in need.**

At age 5, during wintertime in the mountains of Colorado, Chandra Starr was homeless: “I remember being in a blue tent with my mom in the cold night,” Chandra says. “I remember not having enough food.”

Chandra and her mother, Kim Walker, weren’t homeless for long—but even after they secured housing, they still experienced financial difficulties and relied on free provisions from soup kitchens and a food bank.

Unfortunately, much of that food came in cans and boxes and contained excessive amounts of sugar, fat, and salt. Chandra became overweight and constantly felt sick: “I had stomachaches and headaches,” she remembers, adding, “I was always tired.”

Doctors examined Chandra and discovered that largely because of her unhealthy diet, she was suffering from an early form of a serious disease called **diabetes**.

Left untreated, diabetes

damages the body and can lead to blindness and early death. Physicians predicted that if Chandra didn’t alter her diet, she’d eventually require daily injections.

## A Fresh Start

Chandra and Kim educated themselves about nutrition: “We tried to make changes,” Kim remembers, “but when you have no money and you’re living out of a soup kitchen, you don’t have a lot of choices.”

However, Kim and Chandra found a way to make a nourishing diet more affordable: They secured a space at a community garden and planted a variety of vegetables.

Altering her diet had a remarkable **impact** on Chandra, as did the exercise involved in gardening: By the end of that first summer, doctors noted that her condition had improved significantly.

Every spring, Chandra and

**Chandra created gardens to help people who struggle to afford healthy food, as she and her mom once did.**



Kim planted new gardens: “We grow lettuce, carrots, radishes, beets, cucumbers, zucchini, tomatoes, pumpkins ...” says Chandra, now 14.

Today, Chandra enjoys preparing and eating vegetables, and she’s in excellent health: “I don’t have diabetes anymore,” she reports happily.



Teen volunteers work in one of the 91 gardens funded by Chandra’s project. Inset: Chandra with one of her penny-collection jars



## Giving Back

Once every month, Chandra and Kim volunteer at a soup kitchen near their home in Glenwood Springs, Colorado: They prepare and serve a nutritious meal, regularly contributing vegetables from their garden.

Last January, Chandra identified another outlet for her generosity: “I wanted to do something that was close to my heart,” she explains. She

established a Million Penny Project to support community gardens in her area.

Her intention was to collect 1 million pennies, or \$10,000, in support of an organization called Growing Food Forward. The group plants gardens to grow vegetables, which are then delivered to people in need.

Chandra put collection

jars in schools and businesses and also accepted **donations** electronically. Newspapers wrote articles about her project. By April, Chandra had dramatically exceeded her goal: She raised more than \$19,000! That was enough to **fund** 91 gardens.

## Help for the Hungry

Chandra’s efforts have made an incredible difference in her area: At the gardens she funded, volunteers have harvested more than 20,000 pounds of **produce**, which has been delivered directly to food banks and struggling families.

Next year, Chandra hopes to raise even more money and plant more gardens: “I’m going to try harder,” she declares, adding, “I love helping people.”

—Sarah Jane Brian

Chandra carefully reads labels to make sure the food she eats is healthy.

